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RR RUEHMR RUEHRN
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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 011355Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0151
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEHOR/AMEMBASSY GABORONE 5041
RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN 4451
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRETORIA 001982

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/23/2017
TAGS: SADC PREL ETRD ECON POL SF
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CANAVAN REENGAGES SADC MEMBERS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Donald Teitelbaum. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. As part of the Department's efforts to reengage with the Southern African Development Community, U.S. Ambassador to Botswana Katherine Canavan and PolEcon Chief Charles Stonecipher on 21 May held discussions in Pretoria with SADC's resident diplomatic corps and SAG officials to elicit suggestions for U.S. reengagement. Responses were cordial, but ranged from grateful to slightly suspicious, with three key themes emerging. First, infrastructure and capacity-building came out strongly in every meeting as two of SADC's greatest needs. Second, SADC member countries asked that the U.S. give them time to audit their needs, ranging from trade and development to education, peace, and security. Third, SADC members who met with Ambassador Canavan indirectly expressed their frustration with South Africa's dominance within SADC. END SUMMARY.

SADC Diplomats Grateful, But Need Time

¶12. (C) Embassy Pretoria hosted a roundtable with diplomatic representatives accredited to South Africa from Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, and Zambia. After a briefing from Ambassador Canavan on the reengagement process, and a request to hear their views on how best to proceed, all High Commissioners and Counselors relayed their sincere appreciation for the consultation. They asked that the U.S. give SADC members time to examine strategically the organization's needs, which would allow a more thoughtful and complete response. (Note: PolOff overheard the Lesotho High Commissioner tell the Malawian High Commissioner on their way out of the Embassy that they should take up Ambassador Canavan's offer and perform an audit of SADC needs at their next SADC meeting. END NOTE) Fearing that South Africa's budget surplus this year may affect U.S. perceptions of SADC countries, the Zambian High Commissioner also emphasized that "South Africa is not Africa; Africa is poor while South Africa pretends it's not poor."

¶13. (C) Reflecting on possible U.S. roles, the Lesotho and Zambian High Commissioners both expressed gratitude for the educational opportunities the U.S. has afforded southern African countries over the years, but expressed disappointment that the U.S. has cut back on these significantly in recent years. (Note: The HC from Lesotho attended Tuskegee Institute from 1986-88 and the Zambian High Commissioner currently has two children studying at U.S. universities. END NOTE). The Zambian High Commissioner also suggested that the U.S. could assist in resolving border demarcation disputes between SADC countries by providing satellite-based geo-positioning equipment and expertise.

¶4. (C) Ambassador Canavan met with South African Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) Director for SADC, Mr. Hennie Erasmus, to discuss regional trade issues, and to explain current U.S. plans for assisting SADC monitor trade agreement compliance between member states. The trade compliance monitoring project will include the creation of a website to make data available to all parties. Erasmus commented that the monitoring database would be useful, but was skeptical how such a system would work and who would manage it. He said he lacked confidence that the economic and trade staffs at SADC as well as in member capitals could productively manage and utilize systems of this sort. Moreover, SADC is currently amending its protocols and creating a dispute resolution tribunal, though neither have been approved or implemented. According to Erasmus, this and other operational capacity constraints have created a vacuum for trade disputes, in which there is no formal mechanism to facilitate resolution. This has resulted in Ministers "hashing out" problems as they arise, often without any positive outcome. In the end, he said that the database could provide an avenue for resolving this problem and approved of the idea, especially coupled with the use of a monitoring unit with full responsibility. However, he also cautioned that without protocols and regulations in place to deal with unresolved procedures, the database may be premature.

¶5. (C) In regard to the trade framework, Erasmus suggested

PRETORIA 00001982 002 OF 003

that all parties should take stock of current and past International Cooperating Partner (ICP) projects. The EU, in particular, has assisted with trade so there are projects currently underway that no longer need funding assistance. He suggested the U.S. should focus on gaps in assistance, and suggested areas that could include non-trade barriers and industrial development in key sectors such as tourism, services, and transportation. Capacity building within SADC was also cited as an issue, but Erasmus explained that short-term training of a few individuals will not cure the problem. A more creative long-term training strategy is needed to avoid individuals using the training to market themselves and move into more lucrative private employment, leaving SADC again without skilled employees. Erasmus, on behalf of DTI, said he would get back to Ambassador Canavan with any SAG suggestions for regional infrastructure, development, or other projects in which the U.S. could reengage and assist SADC.

DFA REVEALS WIDE INTEREST IN SADC

¶6. (C) Department of Foreign Affairs Director for SADC, Mr. Ghulam Asmal, appeared hesitant to discuss ideas for SADC reengagement outside official SADC channels, which was probably partly due to his recent arrival on the desk, but also a reflection of South Africa's hypersensitivity to other countries' views of its dominance in the region. Asmal also questioned the timing of U.S. interest in reengagement, telling Ambassador Canavan that the EU, China, and India have all been extremely pro-active in getting involved recently, and implying that there must be some unspoken reason for this flurry of interest in SADC. Mr. Short, DFA Director for NEPAD (and who was Mr. Asmal's predecessor) was in contrast extremely informative and open to reengagement. Short added that operationally, it is difficult from the vantage point of the foreign ministry to make strong policy recommendations regarding SADC because most SADC issues for the region are

trade, infrastructure, and customs-related and are usually assigned to trade and finance ministries. Both Asmal and Short mentioned infrastructure, specifically the technology the US has in this area, and capacity, which "is a real problem and which can't be developed overnight." Short suggested that the U.S. look at SADC's early years at the beginning of the 1980's as a guide to exploring how SADC can be more relevant and effective. He noted that donors were then under the impression that South Africa was about to enter a civil war. Donor interventions in the areas of broad-based development, physical infrastructure to facilitate intra-regional trade, trade management and administration made tremendous progress possible.

ZIMBABWE: THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

¶7. (C) Responses from Canavan's interlocutors on Zimbabwe were along the lines to be expected. The SADC diplomats all believe that Mbeki's mediation effort is a step in the right direction and should not be "constantly questioned by outsiders." Moreover, Mbeki should be given time to produce results. The Lesotho High Commissioner recognized that for free and fair elections to occur, the playing field needs to be leveled, but believes holding elections next year might be too soon. The Zambian High Commissioner said that "Mugabe is a difficult person who feels he has earned the right to be President," and that Zimbabwe's purposefully fallacious portrayal of U.S. sanctions as the cause of hardship suffered by the masses probably rings true to many Africans who have suffered under colonialism. The Malawian Ambassador told Ambassador Canavan that "the same people who impose sanctions should engage Zimbabwe," "that the U.S. Congress needs to be sensitized to Africa," and also criticized the West for encouraging and supporting an aggressive and robust civil society, "even when countries have a democratic election like you wanted."

¶8. (C) Ambassador Canavan emphasized that U.S. diplomacy towards SADC is driven by our perception of the region's importance and potential. U.S. interests in SADC are comprehensive and should not be limited by our current concerns about Zimbabwe. In essence, USG motivations for reengaging with SADC were not about Zimbabwe, but rather about SADC's ability to promote stability and development

PRETORIA 00001982 003 OF 003

throughout the region.

¶9. (U) Ambassador Canavan cleared this message.
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